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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 001556

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DEPARTMENT FOR P AND NEA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/01/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [XF](#)

SUBJECT: AMU PROPOSAL TO "INSTITUTIONALIZE" U.S. - MAGHREB
CONTACTS

Classified by DCM Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) In an October 1 meeting, Zoheir Merchaoui, Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) Minister-Plenipotentiary and Counselor for Political Affairs and Information, told A/Polcouns that AMU Secretary-General Habib Ben Yahya returned from New York encouraged by the September 27 meeting of AMU Foreign Ministers hosted by U/S Burns. Noting that the U.S. and the states of North Africa had a common interest in promoting regional cooperation and integration and mitigating disputes that have hampered progress to date, Merchaoui passed on Ben Yahya's sincere appreciation for the U.S. initiative in organizing the meeting.

¶2. (C) Merchaoui said that Ben Yahya believed that it was time to consider institutionalizing Ministerial-level contacts between the USG and the Arab Maghreb Union States. Merchaoui said that the AMU Foreign Ministers will hold an extraordinary meeting in Tripoli in early December and predicted that the gathering would produce a formal proposal for biannual U.S.-AMU Ministerial-level consultations, once annually on the margins of UNGA and once annually in one of the AMU capitals.

¶3. (C) Merchaoui passed on Ben Yahya's thanks for receiving "courtesies of the port" on arrival September 26, but also claimed that Ben Yahya had received no such courtesies upon departure from JFK airport on September 29. Instead, he reported, Ben Yahya was "singled out" by TSA personnel for a "humiliating" search and intensive questioning before being cleared to board his Royal Air Maroc flight for Casablanca. Merchaoui asked that we convey to Washington Ben Yahya's disappointment over the incident.

¶4. (C) Comment: Ben Yahya, a former Tunisian Foreign Minister (and former Defense Minister) and previously Tunisian Ambassador to Washington, is a practical diplomat comfortable dealing with the USG, but he is nonetheless sensitive to protocol issues. While A/Polcouns passed on his informal regrets for any discomfort he experienced, we sense that Ben Yahya is looking for a formal apology from the USG. End comment.

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Riley